WHITE PORCUPINE MULTIPLE TIMBER SALE PROJECT NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

December 7, 2007

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION (DNRC)

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Swan River State Forest's first newsletter for the proposed White Porcupine Multiple Timber Sale Project.

PURPOSE OF NEWSLETTER

- Update you on the project development since the scoping period (see *PROJECT DEVELOPMENT* and *PROJECT CHANGES*).
- Introduce the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) and decisionmaker (see *ID TEAM DEVELOPMENT*).
- Summarize relevant issues that were identified during the scoping period (see *ISSUE DEVELOPMENT*).
- Provide further opportunities for comments on the project and request on-site field tours of the proposed project area (see *OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT*).

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Restoring forest stands to promote biodiversity by historic species composition and covertypes.
2. Improve forest health and productivity by addressing insect and disease issues.
3. Generate revenue to the Common School trust for funding kindergarten through grade 12 public education and benefit local economies.
4. Contribute sufficient volume toward DNRC's annual sustainable yield while incorporating important ecological commitments.
5. Develop and improve the transportation system and infrastructure for long-term management, fire suppression, and public access.
6. Reduce fuel loads and wildfire hazards by decreasing ground and ladder fuel loads.
7. Improve water quality by removing and rehabilitating sediment point sources, and meet Montana Best Management Practices (BMPs) on all project roads, including haul routes to Highway 83.

Revenue earned from timber sales provides funding for public education.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Another newsletter will be written in the spring of 2008.
- Since the initial proposal, the proposed project area has decreased from 10,320 acres to 6,400 acres.
- The DEIS will likely be available for public review during the fall of 2008, when individuals will have another 30 days to review and submit comments.

ID TEAM

DEVELOPMENT

Under the guidance of the *Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA, MCA 75-1-201)*, DNRC uses an interdisciplinary approach when planning timber sale projects and analyzing potential effects of these projects on the natural and human environments. During the initial stages of project development, DNRC formed the White Porcupine ID Team.

WHAT IS AN ID TEAM?

Resource specialists trained in various disciplines that come together as a team.

WHAT DOES AN ID TEAM DO ON A PROJECT?

An ID Team determines relevant potential issues, assesses and describes the existing environment that may be affected by the proposed action, develops and describes appropriate alternatives to the proposed action, assesses and describes the consequences of each alternative to the existing environment, and recommends measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts of the proposed action.

ID TEAM MEMBERS

Swan River State Forest - Kristen Baker, Forest Management Supervisor/White Porcupine Project Leader

Northwestern Land Office - Tony Nelson, Hydrologist, and Garrett Schairer and Carly Walker, Wildlife Biologists

Forest Management Bureau - Jeff Schmalenberg, Soil Scientist; Jim Bower, Fisheries Biologist; Ross Baty, Wildlife Biologist; Jordan Larson, Resource Economist; Tim Spoelma, Silviculturalist; and Sonya Germann, Forest Management Planner

DECISIONMAKER

Dan Roberson, Unit Manager, Swan River State Forest

Public Scoping

Beginning May 31, 2007, DNRC conducted a 30-day initial scoping process for the White Porcupine Multiple Timber Sale Project. During that time, 21 letters and e-mails were received from individuals (6), organizations (1 each from F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Company; Friends of the Wild Swan, Montana Logging Association, Montana Wood Products Association, Hydra Project, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Montana Old Growth Project, Northwest Connections, Swan Ecosystem Center, and Wild West Institute), and agencies (2 from the Montana Land Board staff and 1 each from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Powell County Extension).

Issue Development

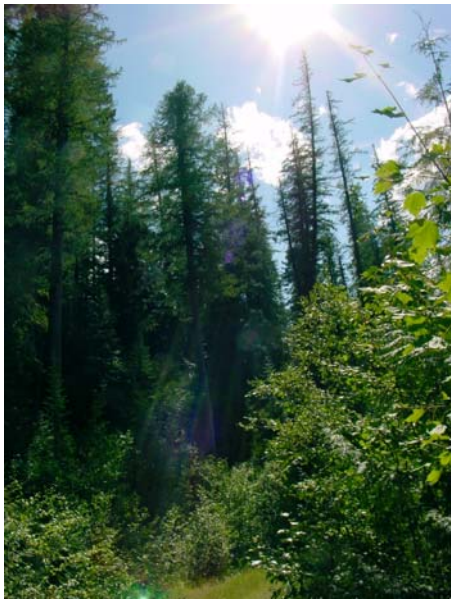
After reviewing the responses received during the public scoping period, the ID Team identified more than 110 issues. The ID Team determined which issues would be analyzed in detail or eliminated from further analysis. The issues to be analyzed in detail were determined to be relevant and within the scope of the project and, therefore, would be included in the impacts analysis. Issues that were eliminated from further analysis were determined to be beyond the scope of the project.

The ID Team developed the following issue statements that will guide the analysis for each individual resource and the development of the alternatives associated with this project.

Vegetation

Harvesting activities may affect:

- forest covertypes through species removal or species composition change;
- age classes through tree removal;
- forest stocking levels through tree removal;
- forest canopy cover through tree removal;
- forest fire conditions, levels, and hazards through tree removal and fuel reduction;
- forest insect and disease levels through tree removal (both suppressed/stressed and infested/infected);
- forest old-growth amounts and quality through tree removal;
- patch size and shape through tree removal;
- sensitive plant populations through ground disturbance;
- noxious weeds through ground disturbance;
- coarse woody debris through resulting reductions or increases in amounts; and
- forest snag amounts and distribution through snag and potential snag-recruitment removal.



Harvesting would likely change forest covertypes, age classes, stocking levels, and canopy cover.

WILDLIFE

The proposed activities could:

- alter the representation of stand age classes on the landscape, which could affect wildlife;
- affect wildlife species associated with old-growth forests;
- disturb or alter forested corridors and connectivity, which could inhibit wildlife movements;
- reduce forest cover, which could adversely affect habitat linkage for wildlife;
- change patch sizes and shapes, which could affect wildlife;
- fragment interior forest habitat;
- reduce the number and distribution of snags, an important component of wildlife habitat;
- reduce levels of coarse woody debris, another important component of wildlife habitat;
- alter suitable lynx denning and foraging habitats, rendering them unsuitable for supporting lynx;
- disturb wolves at denning or rendezvous sites, which could lead to pup abandonment and/ or increased risk of mortality;
- reduce habitat quality on white-tailed deer and elk winter ranges, which could lead to reduced prey availability and reduce the potential for the area to support a wolf pack;
- increase human disturbance and the potential for wolf/human conflicts that could alter wolf use of suitable habitat;
- reduce hiding cover that is important for grizzly bears, which could result in:
  1) increased displacement of grizzly bears,
  2) avoidance of otherwise suitable habitat, and/or
  3) increased risk of bear/human conflicts;
- increase road density, which could result in increased displacement of grizzly bears and increased risk of bear/human conflicts;
- decrease secure areas for grizzly bears, which could result in increased displacement of grizzly bears;
- reduce the amount and/or quality of fisher habitats, which could alter fisher use of the area;
- reduce suitable nesting and foraging habitat for pileated woodpeckers, which could alter their use of the area;
- remove forest cover on important winter ranges, which could lower their capacity to support white-tailed deer and elk; and
- remove elk security cover, which could affect hunter opportunity and the quality of local recreational hunting.

Snags are an important for wildlife habitat.

WATER RESOURCES

- Timber harvesting and associated activities could affect the timing, distribution, and amount of water yield in a harvested watershed.
- Timber harvesting and related activities, such as road construction, could lead to water-quality impacts by increasing the production and delivery of fine sediment to streams.

Placing riprap on streambanks helps reduce sediment and improve water quality.

SOILS

- Traditional ground-based harvesting operations have the potential to compact and displace surface soils, which reduces hydrologic function, macro-porosity, and soil function.
- Harvesting operations have the potential to increase erosion of productive surface soils offsite.
- Harvesting activities associated with the proposed actions may cumulatively affect long-term soil productivity.

Over time, compaction caused by harvesting equipment may reduce soil productivity.

- Activities associated with the proposed actions, such as timber harvesting and road construction, have the potential to increase slope instability through increased water yields, road surface drainage concentrations, and exceedence of resisting forces.
- The removal of large volumes of both coarse and fine woody material through timber harvesting reduces the amount of organic matter and nutrients available for nutrient cycling, possibly affecting the long-term productivity of the site.

ECONOMICS

This project may have economic impacts associated with:

- generating revenue for the trust beneficiaries;
- creating timber-related employment and stimulating the local economy; and
- nonmarket values, which are goods and services in Swan River State Forest that are not traded in the market.

Swan Valley School, kindergarten through grade 8, receives funding from the trust beneficiaries.

CULTURAL

Harvesting activities may affect local cultural resources.

AIR QUALITY

- Dust produced from harvesting activities and hauling may affect local air quality.
- Smoke produced from prescribed burning may affect local air quality.

FISHERIES

The project may affect fish habitat by modifying flow regime, sediments, channel forms, riparian function, amounts of large woody debris, stream temperature, stream nutrients, and stream connectivity.

VISUAL AND AUDITORY RESOURCES

- Harvesting activities may affect local viewsheds and scenic vistas.
- Harvesting activities may increase local noise levels.

RECREATION

Harvesting activities may affect hunting and recreational use within the area.

Recreationalists enjoying snowmobiling in Swan River State Forest.

THESE ISSUE STATEMENTS COULD CHANGE AS PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS CONTINUE.

Public Field Tour

The ID Team, Forest Management Bureau Chief, and decisionmaker hosted a field tour on September 10, 2007, to portions of the proposed project area. Attending this tour were 7 people (1 person each from Friends of the Wild Swan and the Montana Old Growth Project and 5 people from the Swan Ecosystem Center).

The field tour visited stands in and adjacent to the proposed harvest units. The stands included:

- a deteriorating old-growth stand identified as high priority for treatment because of the high levels of insect and disease activity;
- a regenerated stand indicative of DNRC's desired future conditions (describes the set of forest conditions determined by DNRC to best meet the State Forest Land Management Plan objectives).
- an old-growth stand that is not considered for harvesting because the insect and disease level is low and the stand appears to be generally healthy; and
- other stands identified as high priority for treatment due to their species composition and susceptibility to insects and diseases.

Question and answer session during the public field tour in September.

Some questions and concerns that arose during the field tour include:

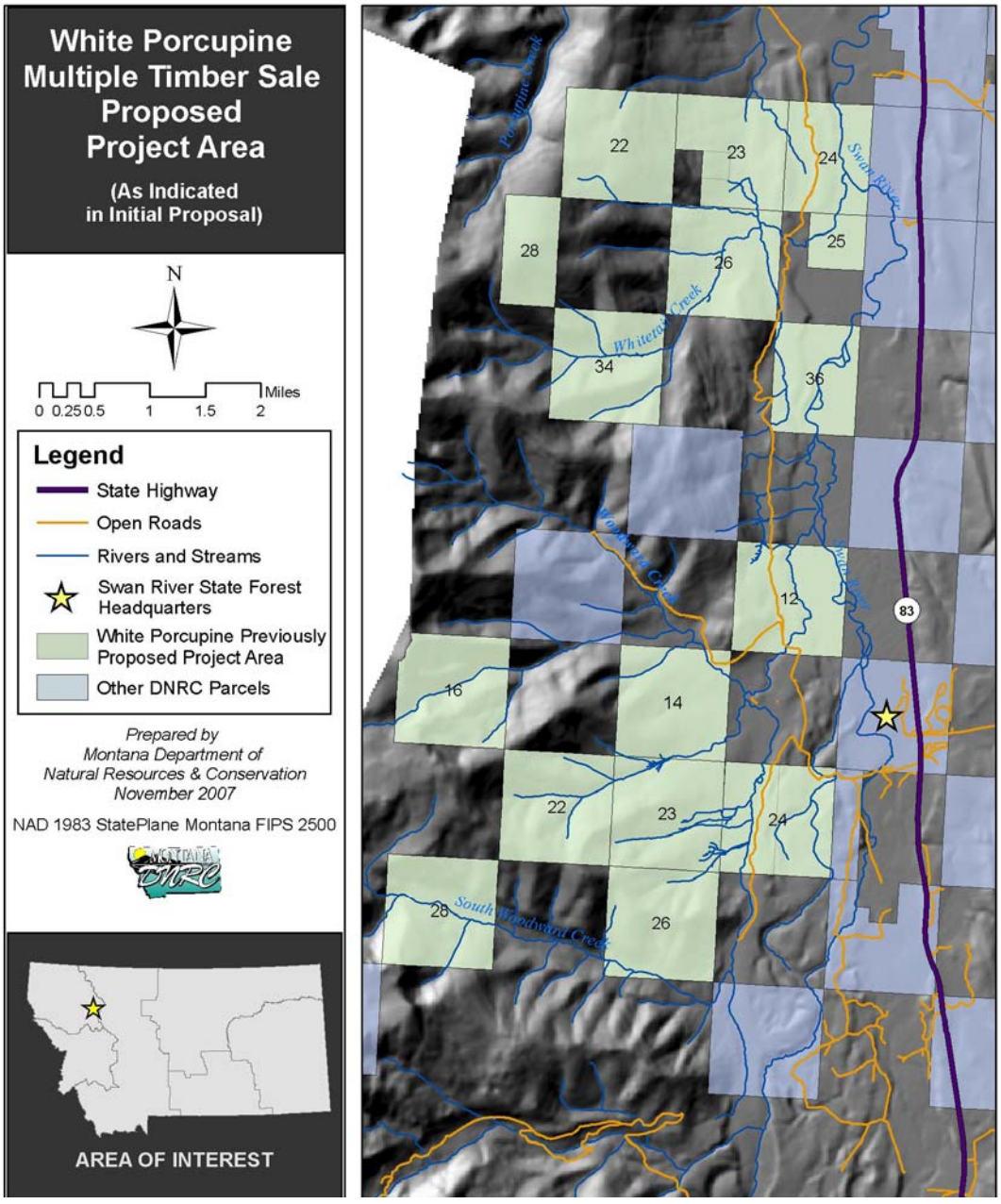
- What is the range of naturally occurring Indian paint fungus in unmanaged stands?
- What are DNRC's measurement criteria in determining forest health?
- How is forest management expected to change in response to climate change?
- DNRC should use local knowledge when developing management prescriptions in Swan River State Forest.
- DNRC should leave treetops on the ground after harvesting in order to return needed nutrients to the soil.
- DNRC should clearly define the project area, direct and indirect analysis areas, and cumulative effects analysis areas in their environmental documents.

These questions and concerns were recorded and incorporated into the issue statements that will assist the ID Team in developing the analyses for each resource and the range of alternatives.

PROJECT CHANGES

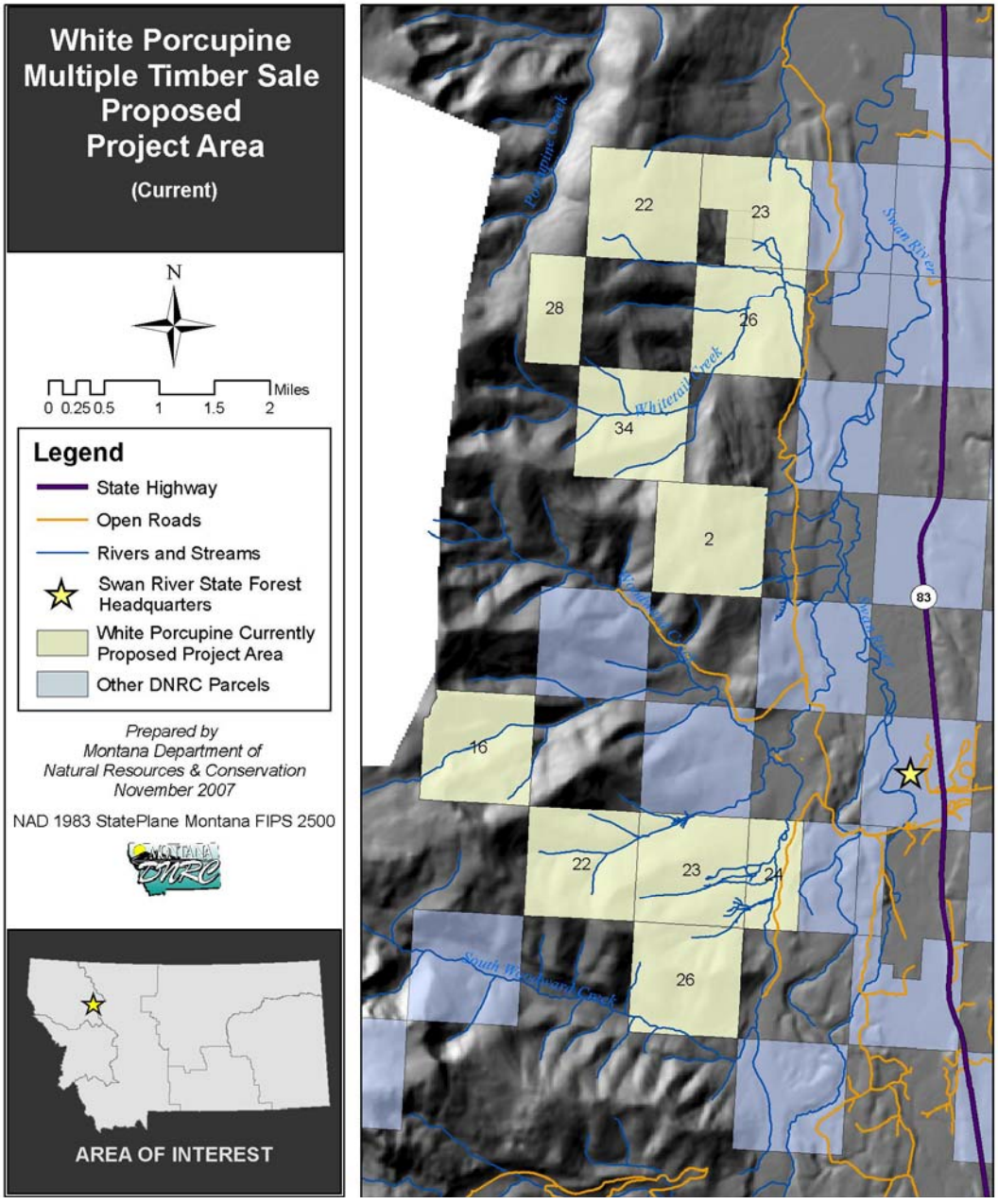
The initial proposal included the following sections in the project area (*see FIGURE 1*): Sections 12, 14, 16, 22, 23, 24, 26, and 28, Township 23 north, Range 18 west; Sections 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 34, and 36, Township 24 north, Range 18 west.

FIGURE 1



Since the initial proposal, the proposed project area has decreased from 10,320 acres to 6,400 acres. The ID Team excluded entire sections or portions of sections from the project area after detailed review of the original project area, close consideration of the project objectives, and issues raised through scoping. One new section was added due to high levels of insect infestations and disease infections that were observed in several stands throughout the section. Currently, the proposed project area consists of the following parcels (*see FIGURE 2*): Sections 2 (*new*), 16, 22, 23, 24 (*now, west half only*), and 26, Township 23 north, Range 18 west; Sections 22, 23, 26, 28, and 34, Township 24 north, Range 18 west.

FIGURE 2



Field Reconnaissance

Since the initial stages of project development, the ID Team has been making multiple visits to the proposed project area to accurately assess the condition of the resources that may be affected by the proposed project. Such assessments are critical in further identifying and describing potential issues, developing a range of reasonable alternatives, describing potential environmental consequences on the affected resources, and developing appropriate measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts of the proposed action.

Field reconnaissance includes:

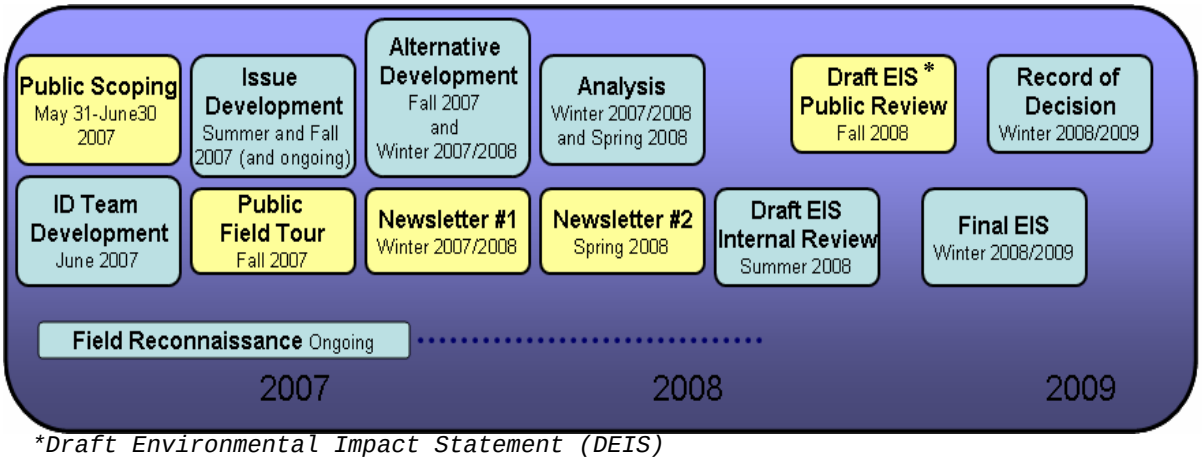
- Assessing presence or absence of fish species in streams in the project area.
- Identifying historic skid trails in previous harvest units to assess cumulative impacts on the soils resource.
- Identifying routes of connectivity important to various terrestrial species in the project area.
- Assessing insect and disease risks to stands in the project area.
- Identifying sediment-point sources that are affecting, or could affect, water quality in the project area.

A culvert near a beaver dam is being checked for blockage by a forester.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The figure below displays the *White Porcupine Multiple Timber Sale Project Time Line*. Yellow boxes indicate periods of project development that are designed to incorporate public involvement. Although the ID Team has specified particular times and methods for public input, public input *is not limited* to these times – the ID Team accepts comments throughout the development of the project.

WHITE PORCUPINE MULTIPLE TIMBER SALE PROJECT TIME LINE



**Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)*

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

At this stage in developing the project, the ID Team has a thorough understanding of the existing conditions of the resources in the project area. This understanding, combined with the identification of issues presented internally and by the public, enables the ID Team to begin developing alternatives.

Alternative development includes a full description of a no-action alternative (current conditions) and a reasonable range of action alternatives. The no-action alternative will serve as a baseline against which the action alternatives will be compared. Prescriptions for stands, transportation plans, and mitigation measures will be developed by the ID Team for each action alternative.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INPUT

The ID Team will strive to provide the public ample opportunity to comment during the development stages of this project. If you wish to participate, the following opportunities should be considered:

- If you did not comment during the initial scoping period and have issues additional to those listed under *ISSUE DEVELOPMENT* (*page 3*), send your comments to the *CONTACT INFORMATION,* above.
- If you would like future mailings regarding this project and have not previously contacted us, send your ***name, mailing address, and a request to be included on the mailing list*** to *CONTACT INFORMATION,* above.
- If you would like to request a field tour of the proposed project area, contact us by phone or e-mail listed under *CONTACT INFORMATION*, above.

WHAT'S TO COME...

Newsletter #2 – In the spring of 2008, the ID Team will distribute another newsletter detailing the alternatives developed for this project.

DEIS – The ID Team anticipates that the DEIS will be available for public review during the fall of 2008. During this time, interested individuals will have 30 days to review and submit comments on the DEIS.